

STEPS FOR A JOURNEY TO WHOLENESS  
FOR LBGTQO PEOPLE IN A CONGREGATION

A Professional Project

presented to

the Faculty of

Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

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**CLAREMONT**  
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has been presented to and accepted by the

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## ABSTRACT

### Steps for a Journey to Wholeness for LGBTQO People in a Congregation

by

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Homosexuality is a contested subject in Christian churches today. There is much research on the topic of bible and scripture abuse, but little is written about the effects of using scripture as a weapon to condemn homosexuality on the LGBTQO community.

After talking to many people in my congregation I found many were unable to let go of the negative experiences they received from their church after coming out to their family and church as a gay man or woman. Many experience a lingering sense of guilt and shame because of their sexual orientation. The person feels guilty because they feel they are letting God down by not being able to change their sexual orientation and shame from the negative attention they receive from their family and/or church. Both guilt and shame causes many LGBTQO to blame God for creating them and not making them “normal” sexually. Understanding the deep pain many LGBTQO persons feel towards God and religion I developed a workshop for participants to express their religious experiences and come away with tools towards healing from any negative church abuse. Through the workshop a person will begin a journey towards spiritual wholeness by embracing their sexuality as a gift from God. Participants will discover God’s purpose for creating all humans deserving of love regardless of a person’s sexual orientation. The workshop will become a bridge that transforms a person from their negative past towards a journey of spiritual wholeness.

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My project is dedicated to my spouse, Theresa A. Swanigan, who is my spiritual and emotional strength. To my family who are always supporting me in all my dreams. To my church for allowing me time to pursue my educational goals and my deacon who preaches for me whenever I need a Sunday off from my duties. And especially to my advisor and professor, Rev. Dr. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, for standing with me and helping all through my journey.

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Problem Addressed by the Project**

I explored the negative effects of religious experiences for LGBTQO members in my congregation when scripture was used as an abusive tool attacking their sexual orientation rather than a loving tool that embraced their sexuality as a gift from God

### **Importance of the Problem**

As a Senior Pastor, I see many people struggle with their faith after feeling abused scripturally because they identify as a homosexual. Whereas sexual abuse leaves a lasting scar on a person's psyche, those who identify as anything other than heterosexual often develop an internalized self-hatred that manifests itself in a low self-image and the inability to feel God's love. Members of my congregation come from diverse religious backgrounds. Many experienced the Bible as more of an abusive tool rather than a source of healing. It is often in our churches where LGBTQO people are most likely to experience the pain of being unworthy to receive God's love. It is often in our churches where many learn that salvation is only for the few who follow a certain set of religious codes. It is often in our churches where Scripture is explained according to the tenants of that particular church or denomination, and combined with self-hatred and internalized homophobia we have people who are emotionally and spiritually wounded in our churches. My hope is for the LGBTQO members of my congregation to benefit from my research by providing tools for them to grow in a deeper relationship with God. And as a pastor I want each person who worships within our church to feel Jesus' love and forgiveness. This is the purpose of a Christian church. The fact that many people who come to our churches are spiritually broken or unable to feel God's love is a challenge for



all of us who want to pass on to others the love God has for each of us and the beauty God sees in all of us as God's child.

### **Thesis Statement**

Because many people within my congregation were hurt by the Christian church due to their sexual orientation, I see a need to develop a workshop that will help people view God as healing rather than punitive and help them begin a healing process towards spiritual wholeness.

### **Definitions of Words**

I have added the "O" to GLBTQ in order to include omnisexual. **Omnisexual**, also called pansexual, is person who sexuality attracted to someone regardless of their sexual or gendered expression. Omnisexual differs from bisexual in that bisexuals may prefer one gender over another, whereas; omnisexuals do not focus on the gender of a person.

**Spiritual abuse** as used in this paper to describe the condition where a person of authority or a church use God and the Bible to berate, degrade a person because of their sexual orientation.

**Bible abuse** is when a person takes scripture out of context or misinterprets scripture to discriminate against a person or group of persons.

**Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS)** is comprehensive approach to healing trauma and other related symptoms. Internal family systems sees consciousness as made up of various "parts" or sub personalities, each with its own perspective, interests, memories, and viewpoint. Internal family systems works to have a person's "parts" come in harmony by not negating the past experiences, but recognizing them and come to a

point in a person's lives where the past trauma or hurts do not affect the person any longer.

### **Work Previously Done In the Field**

My research made me realized that people's understanding of their faith and their views of sexuality are often shaped by their family and society's views. It is through the transmission of person's beliefs transmitted from one generation to another through religious education that is paramount in shaping our religious views. One book that clarified how the role education played in the transmission of faith was *Religious Education a History* by Wayne Urban & Jennings L. Wagoner. Urban and Wagoner's book traces the history of education and the importance religious teaching played in shaping the early education and religious institutions in the United States. I used this book to show our beliefs are often influenced by our family and social contacts long before we set foot in a church. We get a clear picture from Urban and Wagoner of how the understanding of sexual issues from the Europeans who came to the United States influenced the way Christians view their sexuality today.

Another book that traces the "history" of education is Timothy Reagan's book *Non-Western Educational Traditions: Indigenous Approaches to Educational Thought and Practice*. This book looks at the role of education prior to the influence of western education in the Americas. Reagan's book shows that education is not just sitting in a classroom and memorizing words from a book but is also part of the oral tradition of a people. Oral education ensures that faith stories and ideas are passed on one generation to the next in order to transmit religious beliefs within a community or family. Reagan's book takes the reader on a journey with indigenous peoples from Africa, Asia and the

Americas and how they educated and pass on information to the next generation. In my interviews with members of my congregation I saw how strong the oral messages about faith and God played from one generation to the next because of the relationship they have with their families. The transmission of beliefs from one generation to the next with members of my congregation reinforces Reagan's research.

Education is important in ensuring each generation understands the faith traditions within a family or social network, but we need to know as Christians how our Judeo-Christian beliefs came into being. John Van Engen's book, *Educating People of Faith: Exploring the history of Jewish and Christian Communities* traces the foundation of our faith within Jewish and Christian communities from antiquity to the seventeenth century. Engen shows us that a person's faith was more of a daily life observance "*practices*" than just going to church on the Sabbath. *Educating People of Faith* has contributions from many authors so that we get a rich overview of how the faith of Jewish and Christian communities was shaped and experienced across all social economic lines. *Educating People of Faith* is more than a history lesson; it is an overview of Jewish and Christian community's formation from simple faith understandings to formal religious practices. With the understanding of how we came to believe what we do in today's churches, we can fully understand the current views concerning sexual matters. Our views of gender, sex and sexuality is so ingrained in our minds from our religious upbringing that at times our views are considered "truths" without questioning how we came to believe what we believe. The way we are taught theology often paints our view of God, that is why queer theology offers the LBGTQO community a view of theology

that moves outside the box of traditional religious teaching and brings in the voices that have been silent in most theological circles.

In my project queer theology connects the LGBTQO community with God by looking at scripture through the eyes of non-heterosexual identified persons. The development of queer theory began with many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons looking at scripture with the idea that traditional biblical interpretations left out many voices that were ignored in traditional translations of scripture. Queer theology also frees the biblical readers from the sanitized sexual stories of the bible and brings to light the good and bad sexual encounters in the bible, such as the love David had for Jonathan and the inhospitality of the people in Sodom who wanted to rape the two angels and Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well.

Some thoughts I present for my project will be from *The Queer Bible Commentary* which interprets biblical passages through the eyes of the LGBTQO community. This is the reason the works in the *Queer Commentary* is so unique to the study of theology. Bob Goss in his book *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*, is another excellent example of taking our scripture readings and bringing it to life with the understanding that queer sexuality is a gift from God. Goss "outs" scripture by freeing it from the sexual and biases that have been buried under centuries of homophobia and misogamy. These biases contributed to the interpretation of biblical texts that repressed a healthy view of sex and sexuality within our churches. Another queer theological book is Carter Heyward's, *Touching Our Strength: the Erotic Power and the Love of God* by, which shows the need for a new sexual ethics that can free us from the shame we feel from identifying as a non-heterosexual. All of these works shows queer theology as a

liberated, ethical view of sex and scripture through the eyes of “queer” people who view their bodies, themselves and scripture as embraced by God intention for creation.

What many queer theologians are doing, even if not intentional, is to think about Christian ethics as a way to free people to grow in their relationship with God. I found that Margaret Farley’s book, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, helpful in the area of Christian sexual ethics because the book shows that love and sex are more than raw emotions, but should express a mutual, compassionate love between two people. Farley shows that love must be accompanied by sexual justice in order to be ethically fair for both parties involved in a relationship. Justice for Farley must possess seven criteria that define our motives in any relationship and the ways we express ourselves towards one another sexually. These seven criteria which will make any relationship in mutual love are “to do no unjust harm, free consent, mutuality, equality, commitment, fruitfulness, and social justice.” Farley’s book gives the reader reasons to rethink our notions about sex as associated with gender disparity and viewing women as inferior to men throughout our church history.

For my chapter that discusses the purpose of the church, I reference N. Graham Standish’s, *Discovering the Narrow Path: A Guide to Spiritual Balance*, Hans Kung *The Church*, and Joseph C. Hough Jr. and John B. Cobb Jr.’s, *Christian Identity and Theological Education*. These works invites the reader to look at the purpose of a church community and the Christian faith with a view relevant in today’s society. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, *A House of Prayer for All Peoples: Congregations Building Multiracial Community*, is an excellent book showing how a diverse congregation worked out their difference in order to come together in unity by learning about one

another's culture and finding out what they shared in common. This book shows that there is hope in bridging the division over sexual issues if our churches reach out to all people in the spirit of Jesus.

I found a wealth of information written about homosexuality and the Bible, homosexuality and theology and homosexuality in general, but little is written identifying the psychological effects of the bible abuse from attacking the LGBTQO person. What I did notice was that the negative effects of bible abuse on a person was no different from the trauma experienced from any other mental or physical abuse. I compared the effects of post traumatic stress symptoms to that of members on my congregation who were hurt by the Christian church and its teachings. I observed from LGBTQO members in my congregation that the cause of much of their pain came through the hate talk in the media and in the church against homosexuality as expressed from biblical interpretation that viewed homosexuality as a sin. The trauma of bible abuse made me realize how important it is for people to look at scripture for themselves and not only rely on another person's interpretation; especially if the interpretation does not take into account the historical and cultural setting of scripture being read.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Project**

I developed a survey for members from my congregation in order to get an idea of how the faith of their childhood shaped their view of God and religion. I reviewed the data collected through a list of survey questions about their faith and the faith of their family. I then developed a workshop that explored the participant's current views of God, the Christian church and their spiritual wellbeing. The workshop reviewed the scriptures used to condemn homosexuality and scripture for healing from scripture abuse.

I presented a brief overview of the purpose of the church, the role Christian education in shaping our faith and the need for a view of Christian ethics that embraces sex and sexuality as a gift from God to humanity. We then looked at the effects of spiritual abuse, and the use of principles used in “*Internal family systems*” methods to help the healing of any trauma from the abuse.

My weekend workshop gave those in attendance a foundation for experiencing God’s love apart from any abuse they may have felt by past in the area of their sexuality. Developing a religious education teaching series will help the LGBTQO members of my congregation recognize any negative feelings towards Christianity and/or God so that they can begin a path of healing from their negative past. Although my research has relevance across faith traditions, I will limit my project to my local church. Isolating my research to a small group helped me develop a teaching plan that can be implemented for any small group setting. With a small group I was able to guide the discussion in an orderly fashion.

### **Procedure for Integration**

My project explores the ethical issues of the bible and homosexuality as it relates theologically to the teachings of the Christian church and the LGBTQO community. I examined the scriptures used to condemn homosexuality and how the misinterpretation of these scriptures has caused pain in the LGBTQO community and damaged many of their views of God and the church. In order to get to the root of the current Christian views of sexuality, I looked at church history as how people addressed sexual issues over the centuries. My resources come from library research, class assignments, and internet searches in order to develop a workshop that will help the participants begin a journey of

healing spiritually with themselves and God. The workshop was open to any adult in my congregation for the purpose defining past hurts through biblical interpretations and move from a position of a victim to survivor with a deep relationship with God.

### **Chapters Outlines**

Chapter I outlines my thesis problem, the importance of my problem, the thesis Statement, the definition of words, works previously done in the field, scope and limitations and procedures for Integration. This chapter gives an overview of the importance of my DMin project as it relates to healing from spiritual abuse for the LBGTQO members in my congregation. This first chapter will show a need to rethink our Christian theological and ethical views relating to sexuality.

Chapter II defines spiritual abuse towards the LBGTQO community and its effects on the person's mental and spiritual wellbeing. This chapter shows that the effects of spiritual abuse towards members of the LBGTQO community often mimics any type of abusive trauma, but unlike other abuses, spiritual abuse and abuse from biblical interpretation has a devastating effect on a person's relationship with God and their faith.

Chapter III examines the scriptures used to condemn homosexuality and looks at these passages in its context of the whole chapter as well as identifying the cultural setting in which the passages were written. Chapter III also discussed the need to read scripture from personal experiences as a means for the LBGTQO community to take back the bible for themselves and not remain hostage to old interpretations.

Chapter IV will be a study of the purpose of church and its ministry as a means for healing and growing in a deeper relationship with God. Because of the decline in



church attendance by LBGTQO persons, I needed to understand what members within my congregation view the purpose of church. This chapter shows that the purpose of church is a community of care and healing, a place to educate people on their faith and to empower people in their relationship with God and a church community that includes all people in the congregation with a sense of belonging.

Chapter VI will discuss the ethical issues involving sexuality as it relates to the LBGTQO community. I discussed the need for change in Christian sexual ethics as a way to free all people from the narrow view of sexuality regardless of sexual orientation. What I showed was how the current view of sex and sexuality in our Christian churches either hinders many LBGTQO person's relationship with God.

Chapter VII is my DMin project. This chapter contains the church survey I passed out and the results of that survey by members of my congregation. I presented the workshop developed from the survey and my research in this chapter. Chapter VII is a good working point for anyone who desires to embark on a journey of wholeness by rethinking their sexuality, spiritual self-image and their love for God

Chapter VIII will summarize what I learned from my congregation, my project and myself as I progressed through my project. This chapter will be a reflection of all the preceding chapters and interviews.

## **Chapter II: Symptoms of Spiritual Abuse**

Mary Ann Boulette, wrote on the "Yahoo! Contributor Network" on April 24, 2009, that "Fundamentalist Christian(s) hold a Bible in hand while spouting extremely un-Christian verbiage".<sup>1</sup> I agree with Boulette because too often we see many who

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<sup>1</sup> "Using the Bible as a Weapon," April 24, 2009, [http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1679379/using\\_the\\_bible\\_as\\_a\\_weapon.html](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1679379/using_the_bible_as_a_weapon.html)

profess to follow Jesus the Christ act in ways that are contrary to His teachings. The bible means a lot of things to a lot of people and for Christians the bible is a source of inspiration and a guide for daily living. But, the bible can also be a source of dissension and controversy over its interpretation and use as we will see in this paper.

Bible and Spiritual abuse as addressed in this paper has to do with the interpretation of biblical passages that demean, ostracize or demonize a person(s) through misinterpretation of biblical passages or by taking passages out of its social-historical and literary context. Taking biblical passages out of context can lead to a misunderstanding of the message that the writer of a particular book may have intended for their readers. According to Micah Royal in his articles on confronting bible abuse says, “Bible abuse is a form of spiritual abuse.” Spiritual abuse is when religious beliefs or practices are removed from the context they were intended and used as tools of discrimination or oppression of others.”<sup>2</sup> Because of spiritual past abuse towards members in my congregation, many are unable to let go of the negative effects of their religious experiences in order to feel the love that God has for them as a person of worth.

Members of my congregation come from various Christian denominations where they experienced the Bible as an abusive tool towards anyone who does not identify as heterosexual. Many become distrustful of biblical interpretations and God as a result of this abuse. This distrust had lingering, traumatic effect that has resulted in displaying the symptoms of post traumatic stress not unlike any other trauma to a person’s feeling of wellbeing. After speaking with some members in my congregation I found some

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<sup>2</sup> *Confronting Bible Abuse*, by Micah Royal, <http://epistle.us/articles/bibleabuse.html> (accessed October 15, 2010)

experiencing hurt and pain from spiritual and bible abuse concerning their gender and /or sexual orientation. For some the pain of biblical abuse runs so deep that they feel God does not love them. The effects of biblical misuse on a person's psychic are not unlike any other form of post-traumatic-stress syndrome (PTSD). There is diminished self-worth from not being able measure up to the standards set by a particular church or denomination. The person may also experience shame in thinking the religious community may actually be correct in thinking all homosexuals are deviants and sinful. One woman from my church talked about the hypocrisy of her minister, stepfather who preach one way on Sunday and acted contrary to his teachings the rest of the week by sexually assaulting her to make her "heterosexual." Besides being sexually abused by her step father, he used scripture to justify his actions. It is no wonder this woman cannot trust the bible. This is just one case of many who felt betrayed from a church that teaches Jesus' love of forgiveness and equality and yet show hate for those who are LBGQTQO. Because spirituality is often a big part of a person's life, the hurt from ministers and religious institutions can have a lasting effect. Religious or scripture abuse often mimics any post traumatic stress disorder (ptsd). According to the Mayo Institute the symptoms of PTSD may include "flashbacks, or reliving the traumatic event for minutes or even days at a time, upsetting dreams about the traumatic event, trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event, feeling emotionally numb, avoiding activities you once enjoyed, hopelessness about the future, memory problems, trouble concentrating, difficulty maintaining close relationships. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms can come and go depending on a person's stress level."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "symptoms of abuse," Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER), 1998-2010, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/> (assessed November 16, 2010)

Some other common symptoms of spiritual abuse are a low self-esteem, depression and flashbacks of the abuse and if the abuse and feelings of unworthiness goes on for a long time people can also experience anxiety and panic attacks. Other symptoms I have seen with some in the LBGTQO community is the inability to form healthy relationships or the inability to perform sexually because of some unresolved sexual guilt. The excessive use of food, drugs and alcohol use is a way for many LBGTQO persons to numb themselves from the pain of being viewed as a sexual deviant in the eyes of the Christian church. I often hear some say they do not attend church because they are “recovering Catholics,” recovering Pentecostals,” and so forth. What they are really saying is they have been hurt by “religion” and they equate God with a particular church or the church’s teachings. The thought about attending church services often bring about strong, negative feelings to some in the LBGTQO community that I see many freeze outside our church doors out from fear that they will experience a punishing God once again.

Before we fault those who use the bible to attack others we must understand the problem in the translation of the scriptures from its original language into another language. The meaning the author expressed in a particular passage is often lost in the translation. Take the words used to describe something as beautiful, such as “the bomb,” “brick house” and “fly.” Whereas all three of these statement means beautiful, bomb means a person is pretty. Brick house is someone who has a beautiful figure and fly means drop dead gorgeous. If we would translate in a language other than English all three would mean a beautiful person. Whether or not the person has a beautiful personality or a beautiful face and figure is lost in the translation. This is a simplistic way

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of explaining the errors in translation from a foreign language to English, but I hope it is helpful.

### **Chapter III: Scriptures Used Against Homosexuals**

After studying the biblical languages I found many inconsistencies in the scriptural interpretation used by conservative Christians towards the LBGTQO community. What is sad is how the church has distorted the meaning of many biblical passages that are used to condemn homosexuality. There are Seven Scriptures cited showing that God is against homosexuality. Genesis 19 condemns raping of strangers for the purpose of humiliation, Leviticus 18:22 condemns ritual sex in a Pagan temple, Leviticus 20:13 also condemns ritual sex in a temple, Romans 1:26-27 describes a group of heterosexuals who, against their basic nature, engage in same-sex behaviour during ritualistic orgies, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 describes older men using boys for sexual gratification, 1 Timothy 1:9-10 also refers to older men using boys for sexual gratification and Jude 1:7 make reference to sexual relations with angels as seen in Genesis chapter 6.

#### **Genesis 19**

Many religious groups assert that God destroyed Sodom because of homosexuality. This idea that the sin of Sodom was homosexuality cannot be substantiated by a careful study of Genesis 18 and 19. We pick up the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapter 18. In chapter 18 God tells Abraham that the cities of the area is about to be destroyed because of their wickedness. Genesis 18:20,21 says, *“LORD said, ‘How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin!’<sup>21</sup> I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the*

*outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.*”<sup>4</sup> It is apparent from this passage that God has decided to destroy the cities, but wanted the angels to see for themselves the wickedness of the people before they would actually be destroyed. I believe God was just stalling in order to see if some of the people in the city will show hospitality towards strangers and provide a chance for Lot to escape.

Later we see the angels entering Sodom and sitting in the town square. It is here where Abraham's nephew, Lot, invites them to his house when no one came forward to open their home to the strangers. This causes the people to become suspicious of the strangers and surround Lot's house because this area was vulnerable to attacks which made the people distrustful of any strangers coming into their town.

We pick the story up in Genesis 19:4 which says, *“before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house”*<sup>5</sup> In reading this passage I am first struck by the fact that *“all the people to the last man, surrounded the house.”* By focusing on the word “men” in this passage, many ignore the fact that there were women in the crowd and in the city as well. Everywhere in the bible we see the use of “men” to mean “men and woman” or as in the case of Jesus feeding the multitudes the mention of women was an afterthought.<sup>6</sup> It is amazing how religious groups point out that the reference to “men” in this passage indicates homosexual men because of the inference to “gang rape.”

The original Hebrew that is transliterated as *"anshei ha'ir, anshei S'dom"* can have two meanings in this passage. It can mean *"men of the city, even the men of Sodom."* But

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<sup>4</sup>Gen. 18:20-21NRSV

<sup>5</sup>Gen. 19:4 NRSV

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 15: 38 says, “The number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children.” Mark 8:9 says, “About four thousand men were present.” NRSV

it can also mean *"the people of the city, the people of Sodom."* According to The National Gay Pentecostal Alliance, The original Hebrew text may well have said that everyone in Sodom -- men, women and children -- were there according to the Alliance. The *National Gay Pentecostal Alliance* comments: *"This alone tells us that the traditionalists were wrong about the intent of this mob: If you are planning a homosexual orgy, you don't invite the wife and kids!"*<sup>7</sup>

I do believe that the people of Sodom were thinking about doing sexual harm to the visitors and that is why Lot offered his daughters in the place of the visitors. For Lot to offer his daughters is reprehensible to us today, but in Lot's time women held little value and to treat a conquered enemy or stranger like a "woman" sexually was the ultimate form of humiliation.

Ezekiel 16:49-50 tells us the sin of Sodom. It reads, *"And look at the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were proud, sated with food (in Hebrew this phrase literally means eating to the point of vomiting), complacent in their prosperity, and they gave no help to the poor and needy. Rather, they became haughty and committed abominable crimes in my presence; then, as you have seen, I removed them."*<sup>8</sup> These are the sins of Sodom that prompted God to destroy the city in the first place.

Miguel De La Torre says the sin of Sodom and early rabbinical writings refer to "the townsfolk's unwillingness to express hospitality to the visiting strangers."<sup>9</sup> In Luke 10 Jesus tells his disciples who encountered inhospitality to wipe the dust off their feet when encountering in hospitality. Luke 10:11-12 reads, *"Even the dust of your town that*

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Eze 16:49 NAB

<sup>9</sup> Miguel A. De La Torre, *A Lily among thorns: Imagining a New Christian Sexuality*, (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA 2007), 143

*sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near. I tell you, it will be more bearable, on that day(day of judgment) for Sodom than for that town.*”<sup>10</sup> We can see from some biblical passages and Jesus’ reference to Sodom that the sin was inhospitality not homosexuality. The only sexual sin perpetrated in the story of Sodom would be gang-rape by men on another person.

### **Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13**

These passages refer to same-gendered sex. Again let us look at the scripture in its context. Leviticus 18:22 reads, *“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. You shall not have sexual relations with any animal and defile yourself with it, nor shall any woman give herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it: it is perversion.”*<sup>11</sup> Leviticus 20:13 reads, *“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them,”*<sup>12</sup> These verses are part of the “holiness Code” in the Hebrew Scripture which was to separate the Jews from other nations. The “holiness code” is laid out for Israel throughout the Book of Leviticus and parts of Deuteronomy. The prohibition of supposedly homosexual acts follows after the prohibition of the idolatrous sexuality in the worship of the god, Molech, whose cult included male cult prostitutes and bestiality. Leviticus 18 is specifically designed to distinguish the Jews from the people who worshipped the multiple gods of fertility cults.

Leviticus 20:13 is giving the penalties for the Leviticus 18:22 "abomination" or in the Hebrew *"toevah,"* unlike what the English translation implies, toevah does not mean something intrinsically evil, but something ritually unclean for Jews. Eating pork,

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<sup>10</sup> Lk 10:11–12 NIV

<sup>11</sup> Lev. 18:22 NRSV

<sup>12</sup> Lev. 18:22-23, 20:13 NRSV



shellfish, lobster, eating meat three days old, trimming beards was just as much an "abomination" as a man having sexual relations with another man. It is used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to designate those Jewish sins which involve ritual contamination or idolatry. According to Donald Eastman many of the Old Testament verses abomination simply means idolatry.<sup>13</sup> God was determined that the Israelites form a new nation and not adopt the practices of worshipers in Canaan, and the people believed male to male sex as part of pagan worship was a defilement towards God. Same-gendered sex as an orientation was not understood then as it is in today's society.

Chapter 20 begins with a prohibition of sexual idolatry almost identical with chapter 18. Its purpose is a set of ritual "cleanliness" whereby the Jews will be distinguished from neighboring peoples. David Stewart takes the idea of ritual cleanliness a step further by equating the cultic sexual practice of worshipping other gods as being similar to "whoring" against the one and only true God.<sup>14</sup> I can see Stewart's point in that any form of worship towards other gods was the same as sharing worship to the one true God. Because sexual relations between men was part of the pagan worship, any sexual relations between men was thought to be idolatrous. We need to understand that society at that time considered the male seed to carry a tiny human being and to have sexual relations with another man was to waste or kill a human life. We know this is not the case in today's society. However we might interpret the passages in Leviticus, we cannot read into the text the prohibition against same-gendered sex as we understand it today.

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<sup>13</sup> Donald Eastman, *Homosexuality: Not a sickness, Not a sin*, Pamphlet from Metropolitan Community Churches, 1990

<sup>14</sup> Deryn Guest et. Al., comps., *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM, 2007) 89.

### Four New Testament Passages

The first passage addressed is Romans 1:26-27. Romans 1: 26-27 reads, *“Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.”*<sup>15</sup> Paul’s main concern here is the proper relationship between Creator and creature and when people turned from serving God, God let them do whatever they wanted to do. The result of turning away from God is people being “consumed with passion” sexually and having sex against their sexual nature (orientation). Clearly the passage is talking about people for whom sex with the opposite gender is "natural." The argument "against nature" in this passage attacks pederasty which involves forced male rape and slave boy prostitutes. What is overlooked by many Christians is the meaning behind verses 18 to 25 that show the consequences of turning away from God and putting our focus on the created things of the world, such as money, work or amassing large amount of material goods. We see this happening in our own society where sex sells and God is not important in people’s lives.

### I Corinthians 6:9-10

This passage says, *“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral (malakoi) nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders (arsenokoitai) nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of*

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<sup>15</sup> Ro 1:21–27 NIV

God.”<sup>16</sup> Paul lists the types of persons who will be excluded from the kingdom of God and for some he uses the Greek words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in the list. *Malakoi* literally means “soft” and is translated that way in Matthew 11:8 and Luke 7:25, “*As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John, what did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine (malakoi) clothes? No, those who wear fine (malakoi) clothes are in kings’ palaces.*”<sup>17</sup> When it is used in moral contexts in Greek writings it has the meaning of morally weak as in a related word, *malakia*. Paul must have meant what the word commonly means in moral contexts, “morally weak.” There is no justification for translating the word to mean “homosexuals.”

“*Arsen*” in Greek means “*man*” and “*koitai*” means bed. With the Greek translation the word could mean men who exploit boys for sexual gratification since “*Arsenokoitai*, is not found in any existing Greek writings until the second century when it apparently means “pederast,” a corrupter of boys, and the sixth century when it is used for husbands practicing anal intercourse with their wives. Some scholars think that the second century use might come closest to Paul’s intention.”<sup>18</sup> According to the “Queer Bible Commentary” these two words are related to “activities of excess and exploitation.”<sup>19</sup> I agree with this assessment because all of the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians are acts that cause harm to others in one way or another. The society in which Paul lived was full of vices and sexual exploitation in the worshipping of the many pagan gods. The Corinthian church was in a city with many temples honoring many

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Co 6:9–10 NIV

<sup>17</sup> Mt 11:7–8, Lu 7:25

<sup>18</sup> *Translations of "Malakoi" and "Arsenokoitai" Through History (1 Cor 6:9)*, Christian Gays, <http://www.christiangays.com/articles/malakoi.shtml>

<sup>19</sup> Deryn Guest, et al., 614

gods. Paul admonished the Corinthians believers about incest, sexual relations with prostitutes, eating meat dedicated to pagan gods and many of vices that spilled over to the church from people's pagan roots. So, possibly Paul had the actions of temple worship in mind when he addressed the church in 1 Corinthians 6. If the word *Arsenokoitai* is taken in context with the whole chapter, there would not be any justification for translating the word as "homosexuals." Some theologians are fairly certain that this is not the meaning that Paul wanted to convey, since the idea of a homosexual as a sexual orientation only surfaced in the 19th century after the start of the scientific study of human sexuality.

### **I Timothy 1:9-10**

1 Timothy 1:9-10 says, "*We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine*"<sup>20</sup> So like the other two New Testament passages, 1 Timothy 1:10 says nothing about homosexuality and nothing about same-gender sex unless it is part of temple prostitutes or possibly sexual exploitation by older heterosexual men with young boys. Many people feel that the word "perverts" is talking about same-gendered sexual relations.

### **Jude**

The passage in Jude used to condemn homosexuality is Jude 6-7 which reads, "*And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.*"<sup>7</sup> In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those

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<sup>20</sup> 1 Ti 1:9-10 NIV

*who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*"<sup>21</sup> Translators of this passage who equate what is written as the prohibition against same-gendered sex are stretching their imaginations. It is clearly talking about angels having sexual relations with humans. This passage should make clear that the destruction of Sodom was God's anger that angels were going to be raped by human beings. In a similar way God destroyed the earth by the flood in Genesis because people turned away from God and some were having sex with the angels who came to earth.

What is condemned in all of these passages is the displeasure of idolatry, prostitution, pederasty and uninhibited sexual orgies that prevailed those days. All that the biblical writers knew about homosexuality was in the context of sexual exploitation. They did not have our current understanding of a loving, monogamous, same-gendered relationship when they wrote the passages pertaining to same-gendered sex. If we want to look at the issue further, we see the passage in Leviticus that sites homosexuality as an "abomination" also condemns things like eating shellfish, planting two types of crops in a field, blended fabrics and other things all of us do routinely as "abominations" as well. The Bible is not the enemy of the LBGTQO people, it is the Christians who read it and translate the passages out of context.

#### **Chapter IV: The Purpose of the Christian Church and its Ministry**

The primary purpose of the Christian church and its ministry is help people grow spiritually in grace through Jesus' message of love, hope and inclusivity. We know all too well that many of our churches are falling short in this area. On the first day of a summer course, Stephen Kim told the class that "After ten years of ministry most pastors

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<sup>21</sup> Jud 6–7 NIV

burn out”.<sup>22</sup> I tend to agree with his assessment of ministry. If the pastor burns out, then the congregation will begin to lose its passion for their faith as well. What can Pastor’s, church leaders and congregants do to renew their passion for their faith and ministry? One way is to remember the reason we were called to our positions in the first place.

For the past ten years there has been a decline in church memberships for many of our Christian churches. Erwin McManus said, *“My primary assessment would be because American Christians tend to be incredibly self-indulgent. So they see the church as a place that is there for them to meet their needs and to express faith in a way that is meaningful for them. There is almost no genuine compassion or urgency about serving and reaching people who don’t know Christ.”*<sup>23</sup> We do tend to come to church to meet our needs rather than see the need to reach out to others. When we are concern about our own personal needs in a church without any regards for other people’s needs, we become a congregation that is disconnected spiritually. People tend to feel isolated from the group and visitors will sense that there is no place for them in the congregation in which to grow spiritually. Although there may not be any clear cut theological or sociological reasons for the churches’ decline, we cannot ignore the fact that going to church is not relevant in people’s lives as it once was. Church attendance in the Metropolitan Community Churches, which reaches out to the LBGTQO community, has declined in the past ten years. Many said the church lost their focus on the gospel message and they no longer feel connected to the people in the church. The older members have lost the

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<sup>22</sup>Stephen S. Kim, *“The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry”*, Claremont School of Theology Summer course, August 2009

<sup>23</sup> Erwin McManus, *The Decline of Church Membership*, January 24, 2008 The Expositor, January 24, 2008 , <http://theexpositor.wordpress.com/2008/01/24/erwin-mcmanus-on-the-decline-of-church-membership/> (accessed August 2, 2009)

“spark” they once felt about their faith which feeds a felling of uselessness in church as they reach retirement age.

What can church leaders and pastors do to rekindle their zeal and the zeal for members in the congregation for God in sharing of God’s love to others? I do not think there can be any clear cut answers to this question. I do believe there is a need for our churches to become a symbol of hope for all people, a place for people to sort out the doubts and concerns in their lives. Church needs to be a place where people can come to rest in God’s presence and receive tools to live their lives according to the teachings of Jesus the Christ. We as church leaders and congregants need to slow down and reflect on why we believe and how God fits into our beliefs. We need to rekindle the purpose for going to church and honoring God. We need to focus on the spiritual needs of others as well as ourselves. Most importantly we need to show ways members within a local congregation can rekindle their love for Jesus and one another by applying the message and teachings of Jesus to their lives. Jesus’ message was not only one of hope but a message of community. Jesus wanted to unite all people into a sense of community within the “kingdom of God”, which is the “reign of God” in the present and in the future.<sup>24</sup> Jesus teaches us to become the visible manifestation of an invisible God. In other words we should see the teachings of Jesus as reflected in our daily lives, so that others will want to get to know God personally in their lives.

The notion of being a “reflection of Jesus” in the eyes of believers for most churches has replaced the love and care Jesus showed the world a set of rules set down by a church or denomination. Far too often these rules require us to condemn homosexuality as a sin. As a pastor ministering to the LBGTQO community, I realize that the old way

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<sup>24</sup> Hans Kung *The Church*, (Sheed and Ward New York 1967), pgs 56

of doing church with the old set of church rules and dogmas will not inspire people to seek God for their lives. There is too much hate talk against same-gendered relationships by many Christian churches that it has put a wedge between the LGBTQO community and God. It is time for the church built on the teachings of Jesus to reflect His love and heal the hurt many LGBTQO persons experience by abusive biblical teachings. What is needed is to make church a community of believers for the care of the soul and hope in God.

### **The church as a community**

The Christian church considers itself a community of believers with its focus on the ministry of Jesus as its purpose and message. This church community should be one of inclusive love and fellowship within the greater community with Jesus at the center. This community has been maintained by the teachings of Jesus, theologians and church leaders throughout the history of the church through oral and written traditions from the Jewish beginnings to present day sermons on faith. What is in question is the silence of the church on matters of sexuality as a gift from God for all people and not just heterosexuals.

Joseph Hough and John Cobb understood that as teachers, scholars, ministers and seminaries we need to take a fresh look at our faith beginnings and how our faith has been shaped and reshaped over time as the church redefines its role in the church's community. This community according to Hough and Cobb should not be limited to the local church itself. Community goes beyond the local church to the world around the church. By defining community, the purpose of the church's existence will become



clearer.<sup>25</sup> I agree with Hough and Cobb that we need to understand the local church's place in the context of the greater community, but this will mean relooking at scriptural interpretations in light of what we know today concerning sexual orientation and gender equality. We need to know how our faith was shaped and reshaped over the years with in the "community" of believers on the local church level or denominational level. This hopefully will make all of us understand that doing "church as usual" is not what God intended in order to welcome people with the inclusive love of Jesus.

Unfortunately faith has been replaced by "religion" over the years. Our problem with established religion is has lost relevance for our day to day living as believers. We replaced our God's foundation for a community of believers with denominational traditions. Niebuhr wrote, *Denominationalism not the denomination; ecclesiasticism not churches; Biblicism not the bible; Christian not Jesus Christ represents the chief present perversions and confusions in Church and theology,*<sup>26</sup> I agree with Niebuhr that the Christian church has shifted its understanding and focus from Jesus as the basis for our faith to the focus on church traditions as set forth by the early formers of the Christian faith or the so-called "church fathers".

In studying the history of the Christian church, we get a clear understanding of church traditions and why we do the things we do in church. Maybe we can separate faith truths from faith doctrines in our quest for finding true spiritual meaning for our lives. We cannot continue to do church as usual and excuse the church's action of intolerance and exclusion that has become a part of our religious traditions over the years.

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., "Christian Identity and Theological Education" pg. 37

<sup>26</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr. *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education*. 1956 pp 46

An example would be that while I was talking to a woman about the Catholic church's scandal with pedophiles, She mentioned that it should not be a crime because it was the norm in the Roman society during the first century of our church history. This is an unfortunate excuse for perpetuating a wrong. I told this woman that because something was not considered wrong in society's past does not mean it is not morally wrong for God's will for humanity. This also applies to the treatment of the LBGTQO community when it comes to identifying certain scriptures as proof that "God hates fags." Instead by knowing the history of the church we can begin to understand how the local church's philosophy mirrors that of the "church universal".

Hough's and Cobb's view on how we evolved as a church community today through our shared and sometimes ignored histories was very enlightening. Their book showed me that in order for us to fully understand the development of the three major religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity, and its influence in the world today, we cannot ignore the contributions of those who were part of our church history such as women, (homosexuals) and those outside our faith. We must also learn people's idea of a Divine being and the universe prior to our Judeo-Christian beginnings. By ignoring history in the context of all history and experiences, Hough and Cobb feel we also blind ourselves to the exclusion of contributions from many who helped shaped our church community by our limited view of the role women, the poor, (homosexuals)<sup>27</sup> and non-euro-centric people in the church's history.<sup>28</sup> Hough and Cobb sites Bonhoeffer in saying as individuals we cannot function apart from the community. Our sole identity is in the community as part of the whole. To quote Bonhoeffer, "*The individual...is always a self*

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<sup>27</sup> Author's contribution that was not expressed by Hough and Cobb

<sup>28</sup> Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education*  
Brackets are my addition not Hough and Cobb's

*in a community that unites all human communities into one universal community with God.*"<sup>29</sup> The combined history of the individual, local church, denomination and universal church all have shaped our understanding of our faith. When we do not see our individual voices within a church community, we are blinded to the influence our church or denomination have on our religious beliefs.

The average individual in a faith community often do not see the wrongs in the local and denominational church communities. What an individual may see is that the church leaders know what is best for the congregation and adhere to the teachings of the past without regards to its effect on future generations. Liberation theology, Queer biblical commentaries and feminist biblical critique have shown that the Bible must be read with new eyes from the vantage point of oppressed peoples in order to empower all people. When we teach the Biblical stories through our individual experience, we can decipher a different understanding of the scriptures. The importance of looking at our faith and scripture differently is that many people, especially those in the disillusioned, queer community, can begin to see their voice scripture and God's church.

We must remember that the teaching of Christianity is totally unique in that it has a person as its focal point; that person is Jesus the Christ. Yet knowing this, there are still so many different views on what it means to be "Christian". Why are there so many different views on Jesus' messages? N. Graham Standish in his book, *"Discovering the Narrow Path,"* states that the one thing that frustrates him the *"battles...between different and competing denominations, movements, traditions, beliefs and practices in*

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<sup>29</sup> Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education* pg. 37

*the Christian world today.*"<sup>30</sup> With Christians battling about everything from doctrines to the proper dress for worship, it is no wonder there is confusion surrounding the true teachings of the church or the purposes of the church.

What the church needs is for all of us who adopt the notion of being followers of Jesus to actually re-read his life, message and teachings. We must keep in mind that the denominational doctrines are not what God intended for humanity. Our goal in churches should be not only to get back to the basic teachings of Jesus, but we must decide whether those teachings as presented by our religious leaders are valid. Knowing the doctrine of "Love your neighbor" has no meaning without unconditional love towards others.

### **Teaching the gospel of Jesus**

The object of Christian teaching is Jesus Christ. Jesus taught the world messages of love, hope and inclusivity. Love according to Jesus is the foundation of his messages on how we are to live in the kingdom of God. God's desire from the very beginning was to love all people created in God's image regardless of sexual orientation. To be created in God's image means to be created "like God".<sup>31</sup> We are all important and loved by God. What many churches lack today is the message that makes people want to embrace God as someone who cares and loves them as they were created. Many churches preach the angry punishing God and others preach a God who loves while ignoring sin. Both of these teachings are the extreme. God is a loving God, but in God's fairness God cannot condone our sin. What is the message we should be teaching then? I believe we need to

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<sup>30</sup> N. Graham Standish, *Discovering the Narrow Path: A Guide to Spiritual Balance*, Westminster John Knox Press 2002, pgs 152

<sup>31</sup> Gen 1:27 NRSV

teach about God's love, the love that made a way for forgiveness and our desire to change our ways to become more like Jesus, the originator of that forgiveness. Jesus' love was a caring love. A love that was selfless and understanding of all people, no matter what age, social class, gender, sexual orientation or past wrongs. Mother Theresa is the best example of the caring Love of Jesus. She cared about each person as a unique child of God. Mother Theresa said, "*Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think that is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat.*"<sup>32</sup> We must teach that all people are worthy of God's love before we can teach Jesus' message of hope.

I also believe we need to teach about hope and wholeness in mind—body and soul to LBGTQO persons because of the internalize turmoil resulting from years of negative teachings pertaining to their sexuality. How do we teach hope? Hope comes by looking at Jesus' life and the all inclusive message he gave to the world. I believe people lose hope when they feel alienated. Jesus reached out to all who would listen. He gave hope to those he healed. Jesus gave hope to the outcast by treating them as worthy of God's love. Jesus gave hope to women by speaking to them in public and treating them as equals. He gave hope to the homosexual by healing the centurion's "boy." Jesus gives us hope by his all inclusive love. We need to teach about this all inclusive God, even when we have reservations about what it means to be truly inclusive ourselves. Jesus teachings can teach us love for all of God's creations. Jesus challenged the Jewish Laws and traditions, even those relating to the Sabbath. He openly supported women and outcasts. He upheld the poor, the sick and those ostracized to the margins of the Jewish

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<sup>32</sup> Mother Theresa, "Mother Theresa's quotes," <http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/838305>. Mother\_Teresa, (assessed August 4, 2009)

community. Jesus reached beyond His own community, to serve foreigners. In Jesus we see justice and compassion. Jesus wanted us to focus on the hope and grace of God which formed our faith from the very beginning.

But Jesus is Jesus and we are his modern church with centuries of oppressive history built into our faith. Can we take a look at what we were taught to believe, what we believe today that was different from yesterday and how we want our church to look like tomorrow? Will we continue to exclude people because of their ethnicity, their race, their social status, their gender or because we cannot understand a transgender person? The answer is a resounding no. We need to begin to include those who are routinely excluded from full participation in to the body of Christ in all of our churches. All people should be given equal status through their faith in Christ? Isaiah 56 says, *Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed, Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.*<sup>33</sup> God is reaching across denominational, sexual and social lines and pulling in all who want know God. But like the Jews of old and Christians now, we exclude those we feel do not “fit into the Church’s mode.”

Throughout history, people have selected verses from the Bible to discriminate against others and to exclude them from full church participation. Biblical authority was once claimed for condoning slavery and the suppression of black people. Similarly, the suppression of women and the limitation of their participation within the church was

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<sup>33</sup> Isaiah 56:1,8

supported by the application of Scriptural standards and claims of Scriptural authority by the church. In our post-modern world, these former Christian positions of exclusion can no longer remain valid. Women still fight for acceptance within our churches, particularly for recognition in positions of leadership. Many homosexuals are demonized by the church and have turned their backs on God. Christian Homosexuals are told they are not really Christian. In the new created order in Christ, there can be neither male nor female--straight or gay--black or white, because we are all one in Christ Jesus. LBGTQO persons in the bible have been excluded in translation or their presence changed to something they were not in order to show that God "hates all Gays" in the modern church. Yvette Flunder states, *"Inclusivity, with love for all of God's creation, challenges major fundamental, deep-seated Christian beliefs, doctrines and theologies at the center of society which characterize people who do not fit the definition of the acceptable social norm as enemies of God and routinely mistreats, oppresses and excludes people from the community of faith and its institutions."*<sup>34</sup>

The message of Jesus is one of love and inclusively. As church leaders we need to get back to the *basics* of our faith and help our churches grow towards a new way of seeing and being in Christ. Learning how to accurately and effectively teach about our Christian faith to others is essential in renewing our love for God and our faith. Jesus provides us with the best example on how to teach others His messages. Throughout his ministry, Jesus emphasized learning. He taught in order for us to change our minds about faith, to change our spiritual heart in order to reach out to others and to change our self image to God design on our lives.

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<sup>34</sup> "The Fellowship" Founded in 2000 by Rev. Dr. Yvette Flunder.  
<http://www.sfrefuge.org/content.cfm?id=2008>, accessed April 14, 2011

Jesus' whole life is an example to us. Jesus never had a problem with telling people how to live a righteous life and yet living an unrighteous life. What irritated Jesus was the hypocrisy of the church leaders in his day who would say one thing and act completely opposite of their teachings. What would irritate many people today is for our church leaders to teach love and act in hateful ways. Jesus always acted in love. Even in the times when he seemed harsh, his love came through. When Jesus rebuked anyone, it was always with the objective of bringing them back to a righteous and loving life. Therefore, let our teaching be by example, never with hypocrisy. We must lead by example, because our example always speaks louder than our words. People must see the "Christ in our lives" by our actions. When our actions speak love, then people will listen to our teachings about God and our faith.

### **Conclusion**

In order for congregations and church leaders to recover their lost love for Jesus and the "Body of Christ" in their lives and congregation, they must first remember their purpose for doing ministry. Second they must realize that they may not get the praise they want from others, only from God. Third they must show love for what they are doing in the church. When all these goals are met, people will be more apt to listen to our message of hope and love in Christ. Another thing we must do is strip our minds of traditions that are done out of habit without understanding the meaning behind those traditions. We must all learn the history behind our church traditions. We must re-discover the basic foundation of our belief systems. We must examine the ways in which our churches embrace people and the ways in which our churches alienate people. We must look at the life and ministry of Jesus and emulate the way He taught the message of



God's desires for all of creation. I leave you with two quotes from Mother Theresa, "*If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other*" and "*One of the greatest diseases is to be nobody to anybody.*" The Christian church that follows Jesus will teach the foundation of their faith and reach out across divisional lines to bring all into God's ideal plan for the kingdom of God.

## **Chapter V: Christian Sexual Ethics**

Christian sexual ethics is an extremely controversial subject pertaining to sexuality in our churches. We are divided over whether or not homosexuality is a choice or were homosexuals born with their sexual orientation; or is sex between a man and a woman for procreation only? What is the common view of women when it comes to sex? Over the years I asked myself three questions regarding sex and ethics. What kind of ethicist am I? What are my sources? What are my norms?

According to Webster "*Ethics (also known as moral philosophy) is a branch of philosophy dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation: the principle of moral conduct governing an individual or a group.*"<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Christian ethics would be the principles derived from the Christian faith to make moral decisions pertaining to its religion. Too often Scripture and Church traditions are seen as abusive to those who fall outside the "norms" of the church regarding sex. People who are homosexual or want to have sex outside marriage or without the thought of having children are considered outside the "norm" in most church settings.

As a Christian I find the subject of "*Christian Sexual Ethics*" riddled with discrepancies by what I was taught from my church about sexuality and my personal experiences and the knowledge of many scientific breakthroughs regarding the human

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<sup>35</sup> The New Britannica/Webster dictionary and Reference guide (Chicago: 1981), 307

sexuality. The topic of *Christian Sexual Ethics* is an ongoing subject that has caused much debate for centuries, specifically surrounding gender worth, procreation and homosexuality. The ongoing debate over sexual ethics and what is and what is not appropriate has especially fueled anger, mistrust, doubt and misinformation. The controversy surrounding sexual ethics makes me re-examine my ethics regarding sex and sexual love. In order to understand how our views on gender, sex and sexuality came about in the first place I needed to explore the history of the early Christian church regarding its views on sex and gender.

### **Early Christianity's View of Sex and Gender**

There were several people who helped shape our views on sex and the human body. Augustine made the biggest contribution regarding our archaic sexual understanding, but Aquinas and Plato also contributed to our modern attitude about sex. Augustine is the major figure in the teaching of the church on marriage. For him marriage is an office, a duty in which one serves the church and the larger society. This office serves three ends. First marriage is for procreation and raising children for the Kingdom of God. Augustine was less concerned about carrying on the blood line than with more people in the service of God. The second thing Augustine believed was through marriage couples are united and learn faithfulness to each other and to God. The third teaching of Augustine is that marriage is a sacrament and therefore there is no room for divorce.

In spite of the fact that Augustine saw the appropriateness of marriage, he still believed that marriage was the lesser choice to celibacy. Augustine preached chastity and celibacy as a higher morality than marriage because it put the focus on serving God rather

than on the desires of the flesh.<sup>36</sup> Augustine believed that sex was a threat to person's spiritual growth. Augustine insatiable sexual desires before his conversion to Christianity made him equate any sexual desires on his part as being "sinful" in nature. He believed that humans either have a desire for God or a desire for the flesh (sex).<sup>37</sup> He went even further by associating guilt with sex because of his own struggles with the need for sexual gratification. This guilt led Augustine to argue that "*the very act of sexual intercourse itself was tainted with guilt because of the sin of Adam and Eve and that sex should be used only for procreation*".<sup>38</sup> In short, Augustine preached that sex was shameful because of the consequences of original sin of Adam and Eve in which sex became a lustful desire in humans instead of a natural act for procreation with fidelity in marriage.<sup>39</sup> Sexual intercourse was transformed from something innocent to something shameful by the original sin of Adam and Eve, which is passed on from generation to generation according to Augustine.<sup>40</sup>

Besides the fact that sex was thought to be evil outside the confines of marriage and was for the sole purpose of procreation, women and the woman's body were also thought to be evil according to Augustine. Medieval thought understood women being linked with the body which is considered ignorance and sin, while men are linked with the soul which is considered knowledge and virtue.<sup>41</sup> Aquinas did not embrace this thought completely. He saw no separation between the body and the soul. He believed

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<sup>36</sup> , Margaret D. Kamitsuka, 36.

<sup>37</sup> John E. Thiel *Augustine on Eros, Desire and Sexuality*, (Minneapolis, Mn, Fortress Press, 2010), 74.

<sup>38</sup> Margaret D. Kamitsuka and John E. Thiel *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires and sexuality in Christianity: Augustine on Eros, Desire and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, Mn, Fortress Press, 2010), 74.

<sup>39</sup> Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, Continuum, (New York, NY. 2008), 40.

<sup>40</sup> Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, (New York, NY Continuum 2008), 40.

<sup>41</sup> Corey Barnes, *The Embrace of Eros: Thomas Aquinas on the Body and Bodily Passions*, (Minneapolis, Mn. Fortress Press, 2010), 86.

that the “soul gives the body being and that the soul depends on the body for knowledge and perfection,”<sup>42</sup> Thomas Aquinas taught that neither sex nor sexual pleasure was evil in and of itself as long as sex was within the confines of heterosexual marriage.<sup>43</sup>

Plato believed the soul controlled the body but remained superior to the body. Plato believed that the soul was the person who works in conjunction with the body. Plato’s moral ethics of the body states that the body can lead you astray and only the soul can control the bodily passions with reason. It is reason that separates us from other animals. To give in to our sexual passions will make us less than human according to Plato.

Before science proved differently, the understanding was that the male seed was a miniature human being and the women was no more than an incubator to house and keep the human seed until it was large enough to enter the world. Any type of sex that was not for procreation and loving sex within marriage was in fact killing a human embryo.<sup>44</sup> So, what is sexual ethics to me? Any sex that is between two ages appropriate, consenting adults that is based on a loving relationship is ethical. I believe God created us as beautiful, sexual beings and because of this our bodies and sexual expression is God’s gift to us. I do not agree that sex should only be for procreation as Augustine and others teach. What I learned over the years is sex and sexual attraction cannot be confined by the old notion that sex is only for procreation or within the confines of marriage.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>43</sup> A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* ( New York, NY Continuum2008),

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Farley, 44.

### Sources of Christian Sexual Ethics and Sexual Norms

Our understanding of sexual ethics is shaped through several sources according to Margaret Farley. Margaret Farley list four sources for Christian sexual ethics in her book *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*.<sup>45</sup> The major sources she list are One-scripture, two-church tradition from many faiths, three-secular disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, and four-each person's unique experience. Of the four sources Farley shows that scripture and tradition made the most impact on the Christian church's views of sex. Both scripture and tradition speak about a God who loves humans so much that they were saved through Jesus the Christ. The difference is that church traditions base their doctrines on human understanding apart from what God intended for God's church.

Many people believe that scripture is a means whereby God speaks to humanity in order to make sound ethical decisions. Many church officials base their prohibitions towards sexual relations on several scriptures passages regarding marriage and procreation. One scripture thought to mean that sex should be only with one's lawfully-wedded spouse is Genesis 2:24. Genesis 2:24 reads, "*Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh*" And to justify sex as only for procreation we have, "*Be fruitful and multiply*"<sup>46</sup> There are other scriptures quoted to justify prohibiting premarital and homosexual sex. These scriptures are often taken out of context and its historic relevance.

Over the decades Protestant traditions have relaxed their prohibition on married couples having sex only for procreation, but not prohibitions towards homosexuality and

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<sup>45</sup> Margaret A. Farley, *"Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics"* (New York, NY, Continuum 2008), 182.

<sup>46</sup> As recorded in Genesis 1:22; 1:28; 8:17; 9:1; 9:7; 35:11 and Jeremiah 23:3

pre-marital sex. The Catholic Church has not relaxed any of its regulation concerning sexual practices. Any non-procreative sexual activities, such as masturbation, same gender sex, heterosexual sex or the use of birth control that cannot result in pregnancy are forbidden within the guidelines of the Catholic Church. Many people find the Catholic Church's stance on sexual matters archaic and nonscientific. I too find it hard to grasp their teachings with what I know about the human body and human's sexual make-up. Most Christians believe marriage is for procreation, fidelity, companionship, support and as a love covenant before God. Many Christian leaders point to Mark 10:7-8 where Jesus says, *"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"* to mean that God only sanctions heterosexual marriages. Taking the passage in context we see the issue Jesus is addressing is about divorce and whether or not a man can divorce a woman for any reason other than infidelity.

All humans are spiritual and sexual beings, not just heterosexuals, yet the church wants the homosexual community to deny their feelings of love and intimacy that comes with committed relationship. Because of a lack of understanding of what the Bible truly says or does not say about homosexual relationships many LBGTQO persons are driven away from the church and rebel against church traditions and scripture. It is the church's position on sexuality that is outdated and ill-informed that is unethical, not homosexuality. It is hard to trust many religious institutions when they speak against giving the same rights and benefits to homosexuals that are enjoyed by heterosexuals. Scripture and church tradition does not take into account what is normal for a person when it comes to sexual attraction. The high rate of suicides among gay youths, who feel

hopeless by the church's teaching against homosexuality, is a prime example of the torment many gays go through because the church teaches that homosexuality is a sinful choice and not an innate condition.

### **Sexual Norms**

Defining the norms for Christian sexual ethics is not as easy as it may sound. Sexual norms can be personal where a person understands what is pleasurable for as a homosexual may not be the same for heterosexuals. Sexual norms may also be based on society's understanding of sex or a religious organization's comprehension of what is proper and what is not proper when it comes to sex. We must first try to understand what is the basis for the ideas of sexual normality, as well as decide what is considered right and what is considered wrong when it comes to society's understanding sexual ethics and homosexuality.

The church's stance on sex and particularly homosexuality is outdated and does not hold up with the knowledge we now know concerning sexual behaviors and sexual orientations. To say that God only sanctions sexual love between a man and a woman is to deny God's design for humanity's need for companionship, love, respect and sex. We know now that sex between same gendered persons can be just as loving as sex between persons of opposite gender.

Society's view on homosexuality can be just as varied as people's sexual orientation. William Stacy Johnson's points out in his book, *A Time to Embrace: Same-gendered Relationships in Religion, Law and Politics*, that when it comes to same-gendered relationships there are two major viewpoints with different theological understandings. The first viewpoint is the people who are non-affirming in their

assessment of same-gendered relationships and the second are those who affirm same-gendered relationships.<sup>47</sup> Non-affirming viewpoints states that homosexuality is a perversion and should not be tolerated. A person with homosexual tendencies needs to repent or get help to return to God's design that heterosexuality is the norm. A second belief is that homosexuality is an unfortunate tragedy and persons with these deviant tendencies needs to abstain from any same-gendered sexual relations. The third understanding is that homosexuality is a tragedy but as long as a person remains in a monogamous relationship it will be a lesser sin than promiscuity. What is missing from all of these scenarios is the fact that heterosexuals are not asked to change their "normal" sexual pleasures for same-gendered sexual relations, nor are they asked to remain celibate. What is missing in the discussion of homosexuality is that the promiscuity of males with different woman is not even addressed in many churches, but a monogamous heterosexual relationship is frowned upon and there are also no widespread prohibitions against divorce or the demands for non-married persons to remain celibate.

The next set of viewpoints is people who are affirming in their understanding of homosexual love. There are five perceptions of those who deem themselves as welcoming and affirming. The first is legitimization. People with this view feel that same-gendered sins are no different than other sexual sins. They feel it is wrong to distinguish between same-gendered sexual sins from other sexual sins. The second perception is called celebration. This view feels homosexuality is natural and God-given. Homosexuals should celebrate their sexuality and not deny their God-given sexual gift. The third is the liberation model which tries to understand that gender relationship and

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<sup>47</sup> William Stacy Johnson's points out in his book, *A Time to Embrace: Same-gendered Relationships in Religion, Law and Politics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Publishing Company, 2006) 39-108



gender understanding need more exploration and understanding. The fourth is consecration. This view says sexuality, homosexual or heterosexual, is to be embraced and celebrated. A person in a committed relationship should be celebrated and a means of God's grace of human sexuality.

All of these views, whether in the affirming section or non-affirming section, miss the point that sexuality and sexual expressions are not something that can be placed in a neat set of definitions. Many of us know that our human sexuality is a complex subject. Putting sexual expressions in categories of which is the lesser sin is not what God intended. Christian sexual normality lies in the type of relationship that exists between two people. Normal sexual relationships are free from unjust, hurting practices. Normal sexual relationships celebrate the love between two people without the feeling that sexuality is somehow wrong and against God's design. My hope is that all people who say they love God will understand that God does not condemn any loving relationship whether homosexual or heterosexual.

## **Chapter VI: DMin Project**

### **Research Idea**

I was concerned about the amount of LBGTQO people in my area who want nothing to do with church, resulting from the church's hurtful teachings against homosexuality that it does not reflect God's design. I decided to interview a cross section of people in my congregation to better understand their idea of the purpose of the church, their spiritual formation growing up, and their image of God.

### **Importance of the Project**

Many people in my congregation had different experiences with their church of origin. These experiences shaped their image of God and the image of themselves in their relationship with God. It is in our churches where we begin to form these images. It is in our church where we are most likely to experience the pain of feeling unworthy of God's love. It is in our churches where we shape our image of God according to the church's standards. Susan B. Anthony said in 1896, *"I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do because I notice it always coincides with their own desires."*<sup>48</sup> God conforming to the image of conservative Christianity is what many of us experience especially in the LBGTQO community. The image that many LBGTQO person has of God is a judgmental, conditional male with no need for women—children or homosexuals. This distorted view of God has caused spiritual trauma and a low self-image for some in my congregation.

### **Important facts I observed from those I interviewed**

I set up a focus group of six people, from the group surveyed, who felt hurt by their church before becoming a member of our congregation. The group consisted of three women and three men who checked out different faiths in their search for god. We discussed their opinion of religions based on their experiences with different types of faith communities. I listed five common opinions from the group that is probably similar to the view most of us have about our faith. First, religion is based on the idea that a human's relationship with God will improve if we work hard to observe the rules of our local church. I see many in my congregation who come from a Roman Catholic upbringing that are unable to let go of many rituals associated with the worship service.

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<sup>48</sup> Quoteland.com, <http://www.quoteland.com/topic/Desires-Quotes/164/> (accessed December 10, 2009)

It took me awhile to realize I will not go to hell just because I took communion in a church other than a Catholic church. Second thing I observed is that all religions are flawed because religions base their beliefs on the idea that God thinks and acts according to the church's idea of God's intention for believers. We see this every day in the news and during election time when certain faiths believe they are speaking for God in urging people to vote for a particular candidate or to kill abortion doctors and homosexuals. Three, most religions are based on some kind of authoritarian leadership where a leader or group of leaders, mostly males, decide what a person should believe in and how to act in order to please God. Churches like this believe in strict dress codes and take the Bible's word literally. Four, exclusivism is found in all churches, even Metropolitan Community Churches. No matter how hard we try, we are exclusive in one way or another. I also observed that many faiths teach that they alone "have the truth." I remember one pastor on the old Phil Donahue television show years ago saying that only those attending his church will be saved. Five, many churches are so legalistic that they control their members' lives by a strict set of rules and regulations. These churches rule by intimidation and guilt in order to keep their members under their control. Do not think only churches like the Branch Davidians or followers of Jim Jones are controlling. Many fundamental churches are just as controlling with their members. I know of a church that teaches that women are to be "submissive" to the men to the degree that the women cannot meet without having at least one male present in the room.

### **DMin Project Survey Questions<sup>49</sup>**

1. What were the spirituality and/or religion of your parents, grandparents?

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<sup>49</sup> These questions were part of a class exercise taken from my Justin Education class taught by Rev. Dr. Sheryl Kajawa-Holbrook in the Fall of 2009 at Claremont School of Theology.

I ask this question to get a idea of the spiritual roots of the member.

2. What were the spoken messages (overt) you received at the time?

This question will identify some of the teaching that the members received from their family and church regarding their beliefs and codes of behavior.

3. What were the unspoken (covert) messages?

This question will identify some of the message they received that were implied but unspoken. Examples would be that women cannot teach men because no woman is appointed to a position of leadership, or homosexuals are going to hell by preaching the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman as God's design.

4. What would you like to inherit from this experience?

This question would identify some of the positive experiences in a person's faith. An example would be a person's faith helped them form a strong spiritual foundation.

5. What would you like to leave behind?

This question will identify the thing(s) the person wants to forget, such as the feelings of unworthiness or made to feel sinful in God's mind.

6. In your family of origin how was spirituality a source of freedom?

I want people to identify the positive messages they received from their family or church that empowered, uplifted and gave them a positive image of themselves.

7. How did you experience God in your life in your early years and young adult years?

I want to know if God was a personal God or a punishing God. In other words what was your image of God in your life?

8. What does your experience teach about being with the crowd or faith community?

This question will explore the issue of people “following the crowd” in believing church doctrines. Did the person follow the teaching of a particular church or denomination without questioning the ethical impact on other believers.

9. What were some of your moments of oppression within a spiritual or religious community you were part of in the past?

This question wants to identify the negative messages the person received concerning their sexual orientation or gender.

10. What would a church based on freedom and justice look like for you today?

I want to understand a person’s view of the purpose of church that is founded on love and inclusion of all people regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

11. What is your image of God in your present church/spiritual group?

I would like to know if a person’s image of God has changed by their experiences in their present church.

### **People Interviewed**

Twenty people (12 males and 8 females) answered all the questions the survey. In order to get a cross section of people in my congregation I included the age range from ages 6 to 84. I included some of our youth in the survey so that I can see if the youth growing up in our church have a different view of God and their relationship with God than their parents did growing up in the church. The racial and ethnic breakdown of people interviewed are as follows, five Blacks, three from indigenous Tribes in the

United States, seven Caucasians, three Hispanics, one Asian and four of mixed heritage. People identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual, lesbian, gay males, transgendered and bisexual. They identified religiously as Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Mormon, African Methodist Episcopal, Wiccan, Agnostic, Atheist, Christian-Buddhist and some just stated Protestant.

What I observed from the interviews, except for the youth, was that all have been disillusioned by “religion” and church leaders. This made it hard for some to trust what they were taught about God loving them as a person identified with the LBGTQO community. Many people are caught in “religious codependency” where they do not like the impact their religious experience had on them, yet they are compelled to hang on to the old set of standards or religious material. I know how hard it was for me to break away from the doctrines of “Campus Crusade for Christ” and my Catholic upbringing teachings, even though I came to a different understanding of my relationship with God apart from a strict religious doctrine. But in time I was able to let go of the negative influences and embrace my positive experiences and grow in a deeper relationship with God. I notice that those who cannot let go of their Roman Catholic roots have a harder time relying on God than with the saints and Mary-the mother of Jesus. They tend to pray for help from people other than God.

Many turn against their faith and God because they felt hurt from the church’s teachings against LBGTQO persons. I also observed that those who claim to be atheist wonder why intelligent people would believe in the myth of God and Jesus.

### Survey Summation

Our image of God is shaped in the early years of life by our grandparents and parents. God is either a punishing, stern deity--a God that created humans and left them on their own or a God as one who picks and chooses who is worthy of salvation. A person's spiritual experiences in life are often shape by their early image of God. I became interested in the subject of a person faith foundation after a class discussion in my *Justice Education Class* on how the faith of our grandparents and parents shaped our view of God. After deciding on a thesis theme I decided to interview a cross section of people in order to gain a better picture of faith, religion and its influence on people's image of God. What I learned was helpful in seeing the impact a person's religious experience, good or bad, had on all those I studied. Even the idea of "The purpose of church" was different depending on the person's denominational background. And each person interviewed had faith in something, even if that faith was the belief that no God exists. The three things that influence our image of God most are our gender, sexual orientation and church doctrines.

I found that it was easier for the males who were protestant and heterosexual to feel they were created in the perfect image of the God more so than women, either homosexual or heterosexual. The female heterosexuals viewed God a male who values maleness more than femaleness. They also were taught that God wanted them to have children and submit to her husband. On the other hand you happen to identify as other than heterosexual you felt God hated you and that you had no place in the average church except to "hide" your sexual orientation.

What many learn either overtly or covertly was that heterosexism is the norm and all homosexuals are sinners doomed to hell. If you do not do what the denomination or church says you will displease God and be sent to hell. These early images have a lasting effect on some well into their adulthood. Our images of God and self are the foundation that shapes our faith. The religious foundation for our spirituality is formed by the messages we receive early in life. For many this foundation is empowering, for others their religious foundation is like a yoke around their neck that keeps them in a prison of self-hate and a fighting against God. The church's doctrines conveyed different messages early in life for those I interviewed. One Catholic lesbian woman wrote *that "Jesus loved us, died for us, we as Christians believe without question."* A heterosexual Mormon woman wrote that church was a place of *"Judgment, bigotry and intolerance."* I thought it was interesting that two women from strict, dogmatic religions would receive opposite messages early in life. On deeper reflection I realized that the Catholic Church does value nuns and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Women in the Mormon Church have very little worth other than for childbearing.

All of us have an idea of what church was like when we were young and how it should be without all the "religious stuff" getting in the way. An atheist stated that church was a place her family went to for weddings, funerals, baptisms and "Remembrance Day" services. This woman's mother was Wiccan and her father was agnostic, while the grandparents were protestant. Church for her was an unnecessary burden. Church for another person was a place to feel God's love for them in spite of the judgmental rhetoric because she came to church for God and not people. For this 65 year old Black woman church must have been a sacred place for her in order for her to block



all the negative messages in her church. Unfortunately many cannot block out the negative messages. For the majority of people, church is a source of rejection, guilt and shame. A 35 year old gay teacher felt hurt from his church of origin and his family when he came out as a gay male. When the therapy and so-called ex-gay ministries did not work, he was thrown out of his church and his family. The only one who would speak to him was his twin brother. His moment of oppression was being ostracized from his church and family because working in his church gave him a sense of belonging.

A 39 year old lesbian said, *"God does not judge, but the church does and I never understood that. I would go for help and I was judged and turned away. It was very difficult for me to find a religious or spiritual community that I actually felt I belong in."*

A 41 year old lesbian answering the same question said, *"I could not be myself and was hiding my true identity due to fear of rejection until I found the MCC churches."* A transgendered, male to female, had this answer, *"The time my mother's pastor informed her that I was headed straight to hell because I was transgender I felt shame and thought God did not love me. Other times in other churches I felt like hiding from being pitied, the disapproving looks, or being shunned as a deviant."* Before you think only the non-heterosexuals felt oppressed by churches, here are more stories from heterosexuals. A 58 year old heterosexual male felt the racism, the falsehood and the sexist attitude in his faith of origin and the pain of feeling not good enough to warrant God's love, until he left his denomination and began to see God apart from the doctrines of his Catholic upbringing. He noticed this about his church when he came out defending his lesbian sister as being a gift from God. He wrote, *"The Catholic church teaches a false belief that sexuality was a gift from God for procreation only, but other expressions of sexual*

*behavior are not proper and are not blessed by God.” A heterosexual female said, “I am still haunted by images of my childhood and seeing people going to church so that they can say they are good people, when inside their hearts they have no concept of God. They are more interested in getting acceptance and praise from others than learning to accept themselves and seek only the acceptance of God.”*

When talking to several kids from ages 6-12, I get a different picture. They are still young enough to see God as exemplified by Jesus. It could also be because their parents are like my parents, who taught me the true meaning of Christianity apart from the church’s version. These children learn that God created them as unique and wonderful human beings. They also learn God’s desire for them to grow into men and woman of character after Jesus’ example. They are taught about sin and that there are consequences for all of their actions without the guilt of God turning away from them. These children are being taught right from wrong in a differently than their parents.

The adults all felt a church should be a church of justice based on the actions and teachings of Jesus. All of these adults interviewed were hurt by their early experiences of “church” and so I wonder if this is why justice in churches is so important to them. Some still distrust religion and churches, but are working on these feelings. Who could blame them for this distrust because as long as there are people in the churches who make God into their image, many more will come away wounded instead of being healed by a loving God.

What I realized from all of these people is what often a person stays with the religion of their family of origin in order to keep a sense of community until they realize that community is not as loving as they thought it was when they were young. One 65

year Black woman remembers her grandmother feeling out of place in church because she could not afford “good” clothes. Her mother did not feel worthy to enter church, either while she was an alcoholic, even after she quit drinking. These two women had a connection with God that was greater than any in their “home” church. Both her mother and grandmother were avid Bible readers and practice the love of Jesus towards everyone without judgment. It did not matter if the person was gay or straight, white or black or young or old. This is what church should be all about. Because our churches have moved from serving people to serving an idea and many are leaving in search of something better.

I learned from those I interviewed that “religion” is different from “faith.” The people I interviewed saw religion as a set of prohibitions where someone told them what was true and those who did not believe what they were taught were told they were spreading lies of the Devil. They could not question the teachings or doctrines of their church. It is awful when people feel they cannot question their minister of church. Faith on the other hand was a person’s deep connection with God voided of doctrines and personal agenda. Faith was what sustained a person through tough times and faith rejoices in the good times. I want people to become spiritually whole in their faith and themselves. The workshop I developed gave people a chance to rekindle their relationship with God and be comfortable with their sexuality.

### **Workshop**

This workshop was design to help LBGTQO people heal from spiritual abuse or any other trauma affecting their relationship with God. This workshop was limited to adults only. I also found that having heterosexuals was a distraction and of no benefit

with the homosexuals who needed to heal from abuse because of their sexual orientation. There should be a separate workshop for heterosexual to deal with their pain from spiritual abuse that has not to do with their sexual orientation.

### **MORNING SESSION Day One**

#### **1): Greetings and Open in Prayer**

I welcomed each person and thank them for taking time to attend the workshop and opened in prayer. After each person introduced themselves, I went over the itinerary for the weekend.

#### **WARM-UP EXERCISE:<sup>50</sup>**

This exercise is to break the ice and have people relax with those in attendance. I ask everyone to start milling about the room. I then ask them to greet each other, perhaps just by shaking hands.

Participants shake hands and greet one another with the scenarios listed below:

1. someone that sold you a crappy used car
2. greet each other like you greet a long lost friend
3. greet someone like you are a cowboy, a soldier, a nanny, a farmer

After the warm-up exercise I ask the participants their definition of church and I wrote their answers on a board.

The participants gave several answers. Many answers were the same, yet worded differently. The answers for this group in answering the question of their definition of church were,

- ✓ A gathering of same believers

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<sup>50</sup> *Icebreakers for Classroom and Group Dynamics*, <http://www.nelliemuller.com/icebreaking.activities.and.group.dynamics.htm>

- ✓ A safe place to pray
- ✓ A sacred sanctuary for those who are persecuted
- ✓ Church is the body of Christ
- ✓ Underground site for LGBTI Christians who are threaten with prison or

death because of their sexuality

- ✓ A building for worship and prayer
- ✓ A place for people to learn about their faith
- ✓ A spiritual time with family and friends

These answers showed me that the participants were expressing their idea of what church should be like and not the experiences they felt before coming to our church.

Next we discussed God's idea of church or community and the purpose of church. Church as a community brought on many feelings depending or not if their church community was a pasitive or negative experience. The participants stated for church to be a community it must be a group of believers who care for each person's spiritual and physical wellbeing. Their answers were two fold. First their answers came from a feeling of not being a part of the community of believers in their former church and their ideal church community would be one that was spiritually healing and not spiritually hurting. Some of their answers are listed below.

- ✓ Church as a community will also make first-time visitors feel welcome and appreciated.

- ✓ Fellowship time after worship with snacks or food is an ideal way for informal conversations and getting acquainted with visitors.

✓ Visitors will not feel out of place because of certain “cliques” that form in a church.

✓ A community of believers are there to help and support one another in time of need.

The perception first-time visitors have of a church is often not perceived by the members of the church because they often have gotten in a routine of “church as usual.”

Next we moved on to church experiences. I first had people talk about their good church experiences of how they connected their life with what they learned from the scriptures. Two questions I asked were if they were taught the history of Christianity or only their denomination’s history and rules and how they felt about what they were taught? Three common points came out about what they felt was a good criteria for religious education in a church. The three criteria many experienced are that biblical principles were taught in order to understand scriptures and the history of Christianity, the church understood the importance in teaching across generations and the church made everyone feel special regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation or social- economic conditions. I gave a short history of Christianity from our Judeo-Christian roots to present day. My sources were the history books in my list.

Next I had people talk about their negative church experiences—(I wanted people to talk about their negative church experiences after they recalled the good experiences that may have been buried in their memories, so that the focus will not only be on the negative memories.) One participant said hurting experience was when a priest showed disrespect for a patient dying of AIDS and would not even give the person last rites. The priest stood up in church and said anyone with HIV was a sinner and deserves the

disease. Another person's minister joked about people who were HIV positive. I recalled the last day my spouse and I attended a catholic church. We were put off with the action of the priest when after visiting a HIV patient in the hospital, he stood up in mass the next day and told the congregation how he came home, took a shower and burned his clothes. Another person told about a person with AIDS who was kicked out of his apartment for being HIV positive and the church did nothing to help him. These answers showed me the hurt the AIDS crises had for many of us who buried members, sometimes four or five times a week. This time of rejection by churches seemed to overshadow all the other church hurts by participants in the workshop.

People were asked "What is the purpose of church and its ministries?" Their responses were: To spread the word of the lord, a place of release from the negative world, teaching scripture, a place of learning, a safe place to be yourself, a place to feed one's spiritual self, a place to teach non-believers the gospel, a place to spread the word of Jesus, a healing place, a place for fellowship, a place to make people feel welcome, a place to seek community with like people, a safe place for the LBGTQO community to worship. All of their answers were about sharing the gospel of Jesus in a safe, loving and inclusive environment that encouraged spiritual growth.

The group's answers to what church is not seem to be all the things that many of us struggle with from our church on a weekly basis. The groups answers were: church is a place where people lift their hands in praise and go away to gossip, a show place for people to with good clothes that make those who cannot afford decent clothes feel embarrassed, a place where some view church as a dating service rather than a place of worship, a place where hell, fire and damnation sermons uses the words "you" and

towards the congregation instead of “we” when referring to sins, a place where negative messages and words hurt rather than heal. These answers showed a deep aversion to the hypocrisy in many of our churches.

### **Day One’s Afternoon Session (Showing a video of “Christians behaving badly”)**

We watched a video of Fred Phelps and his family picketing a funeral of a service man. We also look at pictures of children holding signs with hateful messages like “God hates fags,” “Homosexual = death,” “Obama is a terrorists,” People calling out slurs and names towards President Obama and Christian’s holding hate signs during the California’s Proposition 8 same-gender marriage debate to name a few. After we watched the videos, I ask the group to describe their feelings and thoughts. The participant’s answers were predictable for the most part. They felt fear, felt anger, felt shame, felt sorrow, felt unloved, felt alone from what they observed. What I did not expect to hear was that some felt sorrow for the misguided people and they felt sorrow for the children who are too young to understand what was happening, but are learning to hate. Some even observed that maybe those who act in a hateful way suffer from the low self-esteem. With the hurt also came compassion I noticed. I believe they developed the compassion after years of hurt and not wanting to repay evil for evil.

I ended the day by having each person talk about their best-loved nursery rhymes or children stories before we closed in prayer.

### **Day 2: Focus on healing from spiritual and Bible abuse.**

We began in prayer and then I opened up the discussion of the definitions of spiritual and bible abuse. We talked about what I read about spiritual abuse and what each person thought their definition of spiritual and bible abuse was through their



experience. The discussion went from definitions to remembrance of personal abuses. Four examples that were common to most of the members in the group were bible studies in which they had to endure listening to the passages being used to condemn homosexuality. This was the most hurtful because the discussion made them feel less than a perfect Christian. Others remember how being a woman in their church was degrading because they were reminded constantly about how to be a real Christian woman they must marry and have kids. These women were reminded on Sunday that they must submit to their husbands as the head of the family. One woman was still hurting after being sexually abused by her minister father. It took 20 years for this woman to come back to church. Those who were made to leave their church when it became known they were homosexual, felt shame and wanted to kill themselves.

After going over the different forms of spiritual abuse, we began to talk about the symptoms that each person experienced in the past as well as the lingering symptoms of past traumas that are still evident in their lives. One woman will not let her daughter alone with anyone, except me, for fear someone may abuse her daughter because she was sexually abused in the church. Another person cringes whenever she passes a conservative church or receives a tract from one of the fundamental churches in her area. Another man is afraid someone might discover he is gay and lose his job in the same way he lost his position in his former church. A transgender woman finds the stares and comments made against her hard to take. She has lost her birth family, wife and kids. She sometimes has flashbacks about being publically humiliated when the pastor made an “example” of her sin in front of the church during Sunday worship.

In discussing the effects of spiritual abuse all of us realized that the symptoms everyone experience by the negative actions are not unlike symptoms experience from any type of trauma that take a form of post traumatic stress disorder (ptsd). Some of the most common PTSD of spiritual abuse are, a low self-esteem, depression and flashbacks of the abuse. If the abuse and feelings of unworthiness goes on for a long time people can also experience anxiety and panic attacks whenever something reminds them of the past trauma. We paused for a discussion of what was discussed and any feelings that negative feelings that surfaced as a result of such a difficult subject.

### **Day Two afternoon session: Healing from the Trauma**

We brainstormed ways we could begin healing from past bible and spiritual abuse. We realize we need to first confront our feelings by identifying the source of our pain and the images that come to mind from the abuse. Some of the questions that we discussed are, how do I learn to trust the church or God again? How do I get the pain from hate language to stop hurting whenever I hear it? One question on everyone's mind was "If God knows everything and loves everyone, then why did not Jesus let people know homosexuality was part of god's created design?"

1. We discussed God's image of us by reading positive scripture about God's care for humankind. Healing from years of abused cannot be achieved by a two day workshop. What we are doing is providing tools for healing in order for a person to become whole spiritually and sexually. One of the tools we used was the concept of radical inclusivity. Radical Inclusivity, *"is the intentional inclusion of all persons; especially people who have traditionally lived at the margins of society, such as people suffering from substance abuse; people living with HIV/AIDS; same-gender loving*

*people; the recently incarcerated; and sex industry workers.*"<sup>51</sup> In order to expect other to include us into the family of God, we need to be inclusive of others. What is hard for many of us is to become truly inclusive. Many of us want to be accepted as we are, but are we willing to welcome into our churches those who practice bondage, feel comfortable in taking a transgender woman to lunch or allow people to call God she or he? If we are honest with ourselves there are people we wish would not enter our churches. Listed below are twelve rules of radical inclusivity. Source to the detailed version will be in the appendices. The rules are listed below.

ONE--Radical Inclusivity is and must be radical.

TWO--Radical Inclusivity, recognizes values, loves and celebrates people on the margin.

THREE--Radical Inclusivity recognizes harm done in the name of God.

FOUR--Radical Inclusivity is intentional and creates ministry on the margin.

FIVE--The primary goal of Radical Inclusivity is not to imitate or change the mainline church, but rather to be Church.

SIX--Radical Inclusivity requires a new way of seeing and a new way of being.

SEVEN--Radical Inclusivity requires awareness, information and understanding.

EIGHT--Radical Inclusivity does not hide and works to undo shame and fear.

NINE--Radical Inclusivity recognizes diversity on the margin.

TEN--Radical Inclusivity must be linked to preaching and teaching.

ELEVEN--Radical Inclusivity demands hospitality.

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<sup>51</sup> Rev. Dr. Yvette Flunder, *The Fellowship*, <http://www.radicallyinclusive.com/content.cfm?id=2006> (accessed October 10, 2010)

TWELVE--Radical Inclusivity is best sustained and celebrated when everyone in the community is responsible and accountable.

Next we reviewed two pamphlets written by MCC pastors, *Homosexuality, Not A Sin, Not A Sickness* by Rev. Elder Don Eastman<sup>52</sup> and *"Our Story Too...Reading the Bible with "New Eyes"* by the Rev. Nancy L. Wilson.<sup>53</sup>

The last exercise was an overview of "Internal Family Systems"-- Internal Family Systems Therapy is comprehensive approach to healing traumas. Based on Jay Earley's book, *Self-Therapy: A Step-By-Step Guide to Creating Wholeness and Healing Your Inner Child Using IFS, A New, Cutting-Edge Psychotherapy*. "***The Internal Family Systems Model (IFS)*** is an integrative approach to individual psychotherapy developed by Richard C. Schwartz, Ph.D. ***Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS)*** is comprehensive approach to healing trauma and other related symptoms that includes guidelines for working with individuals, couples and families. Internal family systems sees consciousness as made up of various "parts" or sub personalities, each with its own perspective, interests, memories, and viewpoint. IFS works to have a person's "parts" come in harmony by not negating the past experiences, but recognize them and get to a point where the past trauma or hurts do not affect the person any longer."<sup>54</sup> I gave an example of how the internal family symptoms model works. Then each person gave examples of how they would like to use this tool. After some mock role-playing, I asked each person what they felt after the experience. I directed them to the web site for further information on Internal Family System techniques.

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<sup>52</sup> Rev. Elder Don Eastman, *Not A Sin, Not A Sickness*, (Universal Fellowship Press, Los Angeles 1990)

<sup>53</sup> Nancy L. Wilson, *Our Story Too...Reading the Bible with New Eyes*, (Universal Fellowship Press, Los Angeles 1991)

<sup>54</sup> The Center for Self Leadership, <http://www.selfleadership.org/node/7285>, (accessed October 3, 2010)

We ended this section with people's thoughts about their experience in the workshop and answered any question they might have. We discussed ways to show inclusive love towards others before we closed with another fun session of tongue twisters.

This fun session was a way to wind down after an emotional weekend. I read the line first, then have others repeat it.<sup>55</sup>

- Babbling Baby Bobby
- Ki-ki, the cuckoo, cuts capers
- Don didn't do the difficult dangerous deeds
- Few folks find the fine flavor
- Jim, Jill, Jane and Johnny jammed jollily
- Little Lillian lets lazy lizards lie along the lily pads
- Nine nice nieces never noticed nine nice nieces noticing nine nice nieces
- , Popular people, people popular places
- Suzy Sampson is surrounded by her sousaphone
- Sheila shall surely show her shining seashore shells
- Little Teddy Tucker toots his tooter toute suite
- Thick thistles throbbed in Thelma Thimble's thumb

**Close in prayer**

### **Conclusion**

I found GLBTQO persons who have a long history of feeling battered by the Christian church often believe the negative judgment of their sexual orientation because

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<sup>55</sup> *Icebreakers for Classroom and Group Dynamics*, <http://www.nelliemuller.com/icebreaking.activities.and.group.dynamamics.htm>

of the perceived “authority” of church leaders. The church leaders are viewed as persons who are expert biblical scholars with a direct link to God over the rest of the congregation. So, in order to feel spiritually whole a person must first understand that God loves them as a created child of God. With the participants of the workshop the idea that they were flaws of creation became clear to me because of what they were taught from their home church. More than half said they believe God knew they were homosexual before they were born,<sup>56</sup> but somehow still felt they are unloved by God and had a lingering distrust with the fundamental churches.

The participants found by over the history of Christianity’s views on sexuality was helpful in realizing that God did not sanction the condemnation of homosexuality. Understanding the meaning behind the scriptures used against the LBGTQO community was helpful in identifying God prohibitions towards any exploitive expression of inhospitality or sexual love. They also learned that homosexuality as an orientation was not understood to the writers of the bible. Participants understood learning the meaning of scripture alone does not change a person’s view of their relationship with God unless that person begins a spiritual healing that goes along with the biblical understanding. A spiritual healing where the person sees themselves perfectly created by God.

By the end of the workshop participants learned how to look at biblical passages through their own experiences and make scriptures alive and personal. Participants were able to confront their hurt feelings, their doubts about God’s love for them and the claims of homosexuality being a sin. By deciding for themselves the meaning behind biblical

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<sup>56</sup> Idea taken from Psalm 139: 15a-16, NIV, *“When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

passages, they were able to move a step closer to overcoming the effects of Bible abuse in their lives and see themselves and others through God's eyes and the liberating message of Jesus Christ.

## Appendixes

### DMin Project Power Point Slides

**1**

#### **Steps Towards a Journey of Wholeness for LGBTQO People in a Congregation**

**2 Why this title?**

Our relationship with God encompass three things, Our sexuality and how that shapes our self-image which in turn determines our love towards God as loving rather than

**3 ICE BREAKER**

shake hands and greet one another with the scenarios listed below:  
someone that sold you a crappy used car  
greet each other like you greet a long lost friend  
greet someone like you are a cowboy, a soldier, a nanny, a farmer

**4**

#### **Purpose of Church**

Discuss the purpose of church  
Discuss what church is not  
Give a brief history of Christianity

Sample Hate posters



**5**

- Discussion of people's church experiences
- Positive church experiences
- Negative church experiences

**6**

Many people are turning away from God and the from Christian church because the church's messages tend to be hurtful. Do you agree?

**7**

#### **Religious Education and Teachings**

We discussed God, faith and codes of behavior first by our family of origin, then by our church

Later we explored the history of education and Christianity

**8**

#### **My Passion**

I began to ache for my congregation and the community in which I minister after seeing people turning from God because of their past church experiences. I decided to survey people's church experiences from childhood to adulthood and in order to understand people's opinion of God and their relationship with God. With the answers from the survey I developed this workshop that explored people's good and negative church experiences from people's past and help them begin self healing from any church abuse, either physically or emotionally.



9

I asked the question "What were some of the positive moments of within the spiritual or religious community you were part of in the past?"

I asked the question "What were some of the moments of oppression within the spiritual or religious community you were part of in the past?"

10

• Discuss God's idea of church or community and the purpose of church.

**Question: Church experiences**

- Have people talk about their good church experiences
- Have people talk about their negative church experiences
- Ask people to give their answers to the question: "What is the purpose of church and its ministries?"

- **1): Greetings and Open in Prayer**
- **WARM-UP EXERCISE:** Obtained from the internet under warm-up exercises for workshops.
- **MORNING SESSION—DAY 1**
- Ask the participants their definition of church—write their answers on a board.
- **Answers from participants:**
- A gathering of same believers
- A safe place to pray
- A sacred sanctuary for those who are persecuted
- Church is the body of Christ
- Underground site for LGBTI Christians who are threaten with prison or death because of their sexuality
- A building for worship and prayer

### • Day One's Afternoon Session

- Showing a video of "Christians behaving badly"
- We watched a video of Fred Phelps and family picketing a funeral of a service man.
- We saw pictures of children holding signs with hate messages printed on them.
- People calling out slurs and names towards President Obama.
- Christian's holding hate signs during the California's Proposition 8 Same-gender marriage debate.
- I ask the group to identify their feelings and thoughts after seeing the video and pictures.
- End the day with each person telling others about their best-loved nursery rhymes or children

### Day Two

#### Morning Session: Pamphlets for Discussion

- Give out copies of Homosexuality is not a sin--Pass out and go over Pamphlet *Not a sickness not a Sin What The Bible Does and Does Not Say* by Rev. Elder Don Eastman
- Give out copies of *Our Story Too* by Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson
- Jesus' teaching of love and acceptance.
- Give out copies of Bishop Yvette Flauders' outline on 12 Steps to Radical Inclusivity
- What Is Radical Inclusivity?

#### Afternoon Session

##### Discussion

- Positive Bible verses for healing
- Pass out and go over the pamphlet *The Bible as Your Friend* by Rev. Dr. Bubby Truluck.
- Taking hold of your past
- Talk about coming to terms with the abuse by dealing with anger, fear, shame, and other feelings.
- First give an overview of "Internal Family Systems"-- Internal Family Systems Therapy is comprehensive approach to healing traumas. Based on Jay Earley's book, *Self-Therapy: A Step-By-Step Guide to Creating Wholeness and Healing Your Inner Child Using IFS, A New, Cutting-Edge*

## **WEB SITES FOR PAMPHLETS DISCUSSED IN THE WORKSHOP**

The expanded version of "12 Steps to Radical Inclusivity, A Model for Recovery from Oppressive and Exclusive Theologies and Religions" can be downloaded at <http://www.radicallyinclusive.com/content.cfm?id=2008>

"Homosexuality; Not A Sin, Not A Sickness; What The Bible Does and Does Not Say" by Rev. Elder Don Eastman and "Our Story Too...Reading the Bible with "New Eyes" by the Rev. Nancy L. Wilson can be downloaded from the web site <http://www.mcccchurch.org>

Web site to access information on "Internal Family Systems" <http://www.selfleadership.org/>

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